

REMARKS

This Application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Final Office Action mailed December 14, 2004. At the time of the Final Office Action, Claims 1-20 were pending in this Application. Claims 1-20 were rejected. Claims 6, 7, 9-12, 14 and 15 have been amended. Claims 1-5, 8, 13 and 16-20 have been cancelled. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and favorable action in this case.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §102

Claims 11-15

Claims 11-15 stand rejected by the Office under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by European Patent Application EP0584605 listing inventors Bruno Di Giusto et al. ("Di Giusto et al."). Applicants respectfully traverse and submit Di Giusto et al. do not disclose each and every limitation of Claims 11-15, *i.e.*, the "independent" "slab feed device." In addition, Applicants have amended Claims 11, 12, 14 and 15 to further clarify the subject matter of the presently claimed embodiment of the invention. The presently claimed embodiment is directed to three (3) sources of slabs, *i.e.*, from the first and second casting machines and the slab feed device. As noted in the Claim 11, the first and second casting machines produce slabs and the slab feed device supplies slabs not produced by the first and second casting machines. Thus, slab feed device supplies slabs from other sources, *e.g.*, another production line, from stored inventory of slabs, and/or purchased slabs. The claimed combination providing three (3) sources of slabs, one of which is "independent" of the first and second sources, *i.e.*, the first and second casting machines provides a heretofore unrealized efficiency in production. Di Giusto et al. merely teaches the known art of utilizing two (2) slab production sources to alternately feed a faster running rolling plant 110 and/or finishing train. The presently claimed embodiment of the invention provides an improvement over the art by the addition of an "independent slab feed device." Applicants respectfully submit the presently claimed embodiment of the invention is patentably distinct over Di Giusto et al. Consequently, Applicants request withdrawal of the rejection and favorable action.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 1-4, 6-8, 16, 17 and 19

Claims 1-4, 6-8, 16, 17 and 19 were rejected by the Office under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over U.S. Patent 5,115,547 issued to Wolfgang Rohde ("Rohde"). Claims 1-4, 16, 17 and 19 have been cancelled. Independent Claim 6 has been amended to specify that the claimed embodiment of the invention is directed to, *inter alia*, an independent "slab feed device" which is capable of feeding slabs produced by a completely independent production line and/or from inventoried, stored, or even purchased slabs. In addition, Rohde only teaches the production of thin-slabs and the presently claimed embodiment of Claim 6 includes a rolling train adapted to receive thick and thin-slabs. Rohde fails to teach such a system. Moreover, the presently claimed "slab feed device" is independent of the first and second casting machines. As shown in Figures 1-4 of Rohde, Rohde's multiple ferries 16 and 17 are not independent of the three casting machines (1,2,3) but is directly dependent thereon and shuffles back and forth between the casting machines (*e.g.*, compare Figure 1 with Figure 2 and the positions of 16 and 17). Unlike the presently claimed embodiment of the invention, Rohde's 16 and 17 ferries are not independent of the production line and thus, cannot act as a supplier of stored, inventoried, or purchased slabs, but are necessarily dependent on the production line which requires the incurred expense of three casting machines. Further, Rohde does not disclose and/or teach a rolling train adapted to receive thin and thick slabs. And as noted, Rohde's system is not designed to achieve the flexibility of the claimed embodiment of the invention, *i.e.*, the independent supply of slabs to the rolling and/or finishing train. And Rohde does not suggest the presently claimed embodiment of the invention. Withdrawal of rejection is requested.

Claims 5, 10, 18, and 20

Claims 5, 10, 18, and 20 were rejected by the Office under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Rohde in view of Di Giusto. Claims 5, 18 and 20 have been cancelled. Claim 10 is dependent on Claim 6 and is, for the same reasons set forth above in relation to Claim 6, non-obvious over the art cited.

CONCLUSION

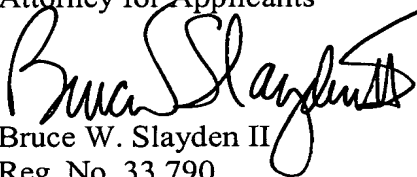
Applicants have now made an earnest effort to place this case in condition for allowance in light of the amendments and remarks set forth above. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of Claims 6, 7, 9-12, 14, and 15 as amended.

Applicants believe there are no fees due, however, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any necessary fees to Deposit Account No. 50-2148 of Baker Botts L.L.P.

If there are any matters concerning this Application that may be cleared up in a telephone conversation, please contact Applicants' attorney at 512.322.2606.

Respectfully submitted,

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